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METHODS

Qualitative Methods in Sport Sciences: A Special FQS Issue

*Ina Hunger, Andrew Sparkes & Reinhard Stelter**

Abstract: Qualitative research has its own particular strengths and therefore is able to grasp the multidimensionality of meanings, contexts, unanticipated phenomena, processes and explanations which can be found in the world of sport, games and physical activity. The article gives an overview over the different subject fields and articles covered by this special issue of the *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* on sport science(s).

1. Grasping the Multidimensionality of Sport, Games and Physical Activity

The term "Sport Sciences" suggests plurality. Accordingly, the domain of sport sciences is a multi- and interdisciplinary research area that includes a number of disciplines, ranging from the psychology and sociology of sports to the physiology of sports performance. Early in its development, the sports sciences were dominated by a quantitative approach to understanding that drew its inspi-

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ration from the natural sciences. However, as the field matured in the late 1980s, debates began in scholarly journals regarding an alternative approach to inquiry. Since then, these debates have intensified and grown in sophistication as qualitative research, in the hands of a small group of scholars, has emerged to make a valuable contribution to sport sciences. This approach to understanding draws on an ontology, epistemology and methodology that shapes both its process and products in such a way as to make qualitative research different, and sometimes very different, from quantitative research (SPARKES, 2002). These differences in process and products provide qualitative research with its own particular strengths. For example, MAXWELL (1996, pp.17-20) points to five particular purposes for which qualitative research is especially suited. These are as follows:

- Understanding the meaning, for the participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with and the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences;
- understanding the particular context within which participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions;
- identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new grounded theories about the latter;
- understanding the process in which events and actions take place;
- developing causal explanations.

Having stated that qualitative research has specific strengths and is different from quantitative research, we do not wish to suggest that the former is characterised by uniformity. In sharp contrast to quantitative research, which despite its internal technical debates seems to be relatively stable and unidimensional with regard to methodology, prevailing feature of present day qualitative research is its diversity. As DENZIN and LINCOLN (2000) point out that the field of qualitative research is defined primarily by a series of essential tensions, contradictions, and hesitations, that work back and forth between competing definitions and conceptions of the field. That is, qualitative research can mean different things to different people.

"The open-ended nature of the qualitative research project leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single, umbrella like paradigm over the entire project. There are multiple interpretive projects, including performance ethnographies; standpoint epistemologies; critical race theory; materialist, feminist ethnographies; projects connected to the British cultural studies and Frankfurt schools; grounded theories of several varieties; multiple strands of ethnomethodology; African American, prophetic, postmodern, and neopragmatic Marxism; an American-based critical cultural studies model; and transactional cultural studies projects." (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2000, p.xv)

It is against this backdrop of difference, diversity, and strength that we are delighted to introduce this special issue of *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* /

Forum: Qualitative Social Research. Given its specific focus on qualitative research in sport sciences we see this as an excellent opportunity to not only add to the debate regarding this approach to inquiry, but also to provide examples of qualitative studies in action. Of course, given the limitations of space and time not all the possible traditions that inform qualitative research in the sport sciences are included in this special edition of the journal. Likewise, it has not been possible to provide extensive coverage of a number of important issues that have been discussed in recent years, such as, new forms of representation and judgement criteria in sport and physical activity (SPARKES, 2002). This said, we feel that the contributors to this special edition provide a taste of what qualitative research can offer the sport sciences. In so doing, they stimulate a number of issues for further debate and provide a source of encouragement for those who wish to engage with this form of inquiry in the future.

Of course, this special edition of *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* / *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* would not have been possible without the hard work of the authors who contributed abstracts and eventually papers. Thus, following the call for abstracts over fifty were submitted. From these, as editors we selected twenty one, and asked the authors to provide an article that would be subjected to anonymous peer review. Following this process, twelve articles were finally selected for inclusion in this special edition. This selection process has not been easy for us. We would like to express our gratitude to the following scholars who kindly acted as reviewers, and whose comments have guided our thinking: Franz BREUER, Jim DENISON, Knut DIETRICH, Guy FAULKNER, Sarah Jane FINLAY, Ejgil JESPERSEN, Ronald HITZLER, Andreas HOHMANN, Ina HUNGER, Philip MAYRING, Günter MEY, Jörn MUNZERT, Gertrud PFISTER, Margrit SCHREIER, Brett SMITH, Andrew SPARKES, Reinhard STELTER, Oliver STOLL, Jörg THIELE, and Jaan VALSINER.

2. The Sport Psychological Perspective

A number of themes are contained within this special edition. The first group of articles take a psychological perspective as their starting point for exploring the personal and contextual dimensions of experience in sport performance.

Sara-Jane FINLAY and Guy FAULKNER focus on the personal perspective by outlining the parameters of a discursive approach to attributions in sport psychology. On the basis of athletes' discussions of their sporting performance, the authors consider the management of attributions as talk-in-action, rather than a series of discrete cognitive elements and dimensions.

Three further articles consider the personal dimensions of sport involvement in an attempt to understand better the ways in which specific contexts shape the emotional investments made by the athlete.

Yuri HANIN introduces the IZOF-model and its potential to contribute to qualitative understanding. His article illuminates the metaphorical and narrative dimensions of emotional expression, and illustrates how emotions can be adaptive or maladaptive for specific athletes in specific contexts.

Helen HOOPER in co-operation with Les BURWITZ and Phil HODKINSON extend our understanding of emotional dimensions in sport via their case study of one athlete, who regarded himself as an "unemotional" performer. The analysis provided, however, suggests that self-definition is open to question.

Abigail LOCKE is also focused on emotions in relation to athletic performance. For her, discourses of emotion form part of a larger accounting systems that are embedded within certain narrative structures. Accordingly, when they talk about their emotional experiences, athletes construct and fit them into cultural and normative frames of accountability.

Two more articles in this special edition draw upon a psychological orientation: Jens KLEINERT provides insight in the meaning of self-talk in relation the experience of pain and emotionally related psychological states. He illustrates that self-talk has regulative functions in the pain management process, and suggests that task-oriented self-talk is important for coping with pain. Andreas MARLOVITS focuses on the material world of the athlete by utilising an approach described as "psychological object analysis". This approach is illustrated via an interview based study that provides a psychological description and analysis of sports equipment.

3. Educational and Coaching Contexts

Three articles are included that have a sport pedagogical perspective and/or are oriented towards the educational or coaching context. Here, the analyses are directed towards understanding the setting and the interaction of the different protagonists in specific contexts:

Peter FREI and Ilka LÜSEBRINK focus on the triad of describing, understanding and consulting in relation to national female gymnastics. They suggest an approach that is sensitive to the possible stresses and risks of the triad as they identify problematic action patterns used by the gymnasts. Here, the subject is understood as being located within a culture of discourse that establishes and defines the form, and content, of the knowledge required by different people in a settings as they seek integration.

Peter KUHN explores the life-world of children, their wishes, and ideas with regard to sport, games and movement activities. Drawing on a variety of data resources, including, children's drawings, he presents a novel approach to qualitative analysis.

Katja SCHMITT and Udo HANKE broaden our knowledge in regard to feedback in motor learning and the coach-athlete interaction. They supplement

the observable processes of feedback interaction through the reconstruction of the cognitive processes, and so develop insights into the subjective theories of coaches and their athletes.

Originally, the editors hoped for a number of articles that focused on gender issues in sport. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, this special edition contains just the following article that deals with this issue:

Håkan LARSSON presents data that reveals the social construction of manliness and womanliness in Swedish sport. Differences in self-perceptions of boys and girls are used to explore issues relating to gender equity policy in sport as a new way of creating sexual/gender difference.

4. Ethics and Ethnography

Finally, the collection of articles contains two contributions which take a more general perspective on the status of qualitative research in sport science:

Steve OLIVIER and Lesley FISHWICK focus on ethical questions in relation to a qualitative research design. They highlight the problems for qualitative researchers who have to fit their proposals into the framework provided by the biomedical ethics model that remains dominant. Some strategies for overcoming these problems are suggested. It is concluded that qualitative researchers need to recognise and plan for ethical issues in their work. Likewise, ethics committees need to recognise that qualitative work poses unique problems, but that these need not necessarily be insurmountable obstacles to project approval.

Jörg THIELE focuses on the significance, importance, and possibility of the ethnographic approaches within the German-speaking sports sciences. He calls for the meaning of the term "ethnography" to be widened so that it includes many different and "strange" sporting activities and contexts. The benefit of an explicit and systematic integration of ethnographic research into sport sciences is discussed.

Finally, it remains for us to invite you, the readers, to engage with the articles that appear in this special edition of *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* / *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. We have been honoured to act as guest editors and we sincerely hope that you both enjoy and gain something from the end product.

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Appendix: Abstracts of the FQS Volume

"Actually I Was the Star": Managing Attributions in Conversation

Sara-Jane Finlay & Guy Faulkner

In this paper, we outline the parameters of a discursive approach to attributions in sport psychology. Attribution theory has had a strong presence within sport and exercise psychology. Attributions are the perceived causes or reasons that people give for an occurrence related to themselves or others. An attributional model, developed in educational psychology, has been most influential and often requires the researcher(s) or participants to determine the dimensional categorisation of attributions (e.g., internal-external, stable-unstable, controllable-uncontrollable). Assessing attributions in sport and exercise psychology has been almost exclusively through self-report questionnaires and entrenched within a limited theoretical perspective. In contrast, a discursive approach focuses on discourse and what is accomplished through people's talk. Such an approach would advocate a move from a view of talk (discourse) as a route to internal or dimensional categories to an emphasis on talk as the event of interest. Using principles of conversation analysis (CA), a critical examination of the traditional conceptualisation of attributions will be offered in this paper. Drawing on a corpus of data where athletes discuss their sporting performance, we consider the management of attributions as talk-in-action, rather than a series of discrete cognitive elements and dimensions. To illustrate the way that attributions are managed in conversation, we consider three areas—asking questions about loss, the interactional modesty inherent in discussing wins and the "slipperiness" of attributions in conversation. Finally, the implications of a discursive approach to the study of attributions in sport and exercise psychology are discussed.

The Problem of Using Scientific Knowledge—Discussed on the Example of a Study of Female Gymnasts in Germany

Peter Frei & Ilka Lüsebrink

The success of qualitative social research often depends on the chance to collect data as authentically as possible, e.g., in case of investigating life-world

contexts that means data which are very close to the attitudes and perspectives of the protagonists acting in their respective contexts. Frankness and communication are central premises which have to be considered, especially when the field to be investigated is quite unexplored and unfamiliar. With frankness and communication the relationship between researchers and those to be researched often changes in the course of a prolonged research process in a way that the former want to increasingly formulate offers for the participants out of a previous descriptive attitude and the latter shed their scepticism towards the researchers and expect or hope for something in return (e.g., consultation services). At this point a special problem of research becomes critical: What looks like identical intentions could not be more disparate. What researchers produce is knowledge of a research field and the individuals acting in this field from which practical consequences can not be easily deduced. In the attempt of the research subjects to find such deductions nonetheless there will be almost inevitably biases in the corresponding research results. This fundamental problem of using scientific knowledge is discussed based on the example of a qualitative study of female gymnastics.

Performance Related Emotional States in Sport: A Qualitative Analysis

Yuri L. Hanin

In this paper, I provide a brief overview of the sports-specific individualized approach (termed—the Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning [IZOF] model) as an action-oriented framework for qualitative analysis of performance related emotional states. First, I highlight the issue of multidimensionality and introduce five basic dimensions (penta-basis) to describe performance-related emotional states. These dimensions include form, content/quality, intensity, time, and context. Four major IZOF-based predictions of emotion-performance relationships focus on interindividual variability of optimal emotion intensity and content, the in-out of the zone notion, interactive effects of emotions enhancing and impairing performance, and bi-directionality of emotion-performance relationships. Then, I describe several projects that use different data collection techniques for assessment of idiosyncratic emotion content. These include interviews, individualized emotion profiling, metaphor-generation method, and narratives. Future research directions from individualized and discursive perspectives are suggested and implications for combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in the analysis of performance related states are discussed.

Exploring the Benefits of a Broader Approach to Qualitative Research in Sport Psychology: A Tale of Two, or Three, James

Helen Hooper, Les Burwitz & Phil Hodgkinson

A longitudinal case-study of emotion and sport performance is used to illustrate findings of a larger interview study conducted with 12 elite (World top ten) individual sport athletes. Although athletes' experiences were partially supportive of current theoretical standpoints, optimal states proved dynamic and related to personal, situational and social variables. Further information, gathered using more ethnographic approaches, will then be considered. The limitations of a reliance on coded interview data as a meaningful tool with which to explore athletes' experiences will be discussed in relation to the featured athlete. The existence of multiple interpretations of the athlete's story, problematises the assumption that rigorous methods, as conventionally defined, can guarantee objectivity and discover a single truth. Questions are asked of the reader regarding: the veracity of accepted approaches to the collection and presentation of data; the benefits of a broader vision for qualitative research; and the possible contribution of more interpretive approaches to the work of both practitioners and academics in sport psychology.

Action-Adjusting Functions of Self-Talk in Situations with Physical Pain: A Qualitative Analysis in Marathon Running

Jens Kleinert

Introduction: In the present study we examined the functions of self-talk in the regulation of coping with physical pain. The conceptual background of the study is action-oriented, which means that coping behavior is postulated as an intentional process and is divided into three phases (anticipation, realization, interpretation). In each of these phases self-talks have typical regulation functions (e.g., as information processing, problem solving, or the regulation of motivational and emotional states). *Methods:* We carried out problem-centered interviews with 30 male marathon runners concerning situations in which they had experienced and managed pain to detect functions of self-talk during the pain management process. We used content analyses to find typical categories and functions of self-talk. *Results:* In regard to content we found two types of self-talk. One type of self-talk focuses on the pain and the pain management (pain-oriented self-talk) whereas the other type emphasizes the hierarchically overlying action, which in our case means the marathon (task-oriented self-talk). Furthermore we found several functions of self-talks in different phases of the pain management process: Analysis of pain and situation, detachment,

reappraisal, enhancement of self-efficacy, action instruction, activation of volition, correction of action, regulation of psychophysiological tension. *Conclusion:* Self-talks represent several typical regulative functions in the pain management process. Especially task-oriented self-talks seem to be important in coping with pain. These self-talks help the person to detach by focusing on the main aims. Furthermore task-oriented self-talks help to detect causes of pain, they help to put pain into perspective and they help to protect task-oriented intentions against pain-oriented frustration.

Thematic Drawing and Focused, Episodic Interview upon the Drawing—A Method in Order to Approach to the Children's Point of View on Movement, Play and Sports at School

Peter Kuhn

This article follows the steps of a qualitative research project from an initial interest to the results. The research project "What children moves" intends to find out children's wishes and ideas concerning moving-, playing- and sports-activities at school. The method of data collection is a combination of thematic drawing and focused, episodic interview. The subject for the drawing—"These are my wishes for classroom lessons, for the schoolyard and for physical education lessons within a Moving School"—is connected with an adapted kind of "Three Wishes Free" instruction. The children are asked to draw one picture for each of the school related areas mentioned above. Some days after having handed in their drawings, the children are interviewed. The drawings and the transcripts of the interviews pass a special kind of qualitative analysis. The drawing sample comprises 395 children from the 2nd to the 6th grade. The interview comprises contents from 64 children out of the drawing sample, 32 girls and 32 boys.

A History of the Present on the "Sportsman" and the "Sportswoman"

Håkan Larsson

The purpose of this article is to disseminate the construction of manliness and womanliness in Swedish sport. Of particular interest is gender equity policy in sport as a new way of creating sexual/gender difference. Michel FOUCAULT's concept "a history of the present"—a genealogical approach—serves as an important tool in this work. Interviews with athletes in their teens (track & field athletics) and texts published by the Swedish Sports Confederation serve as empirical material.

When asked about themselves as track & field athletes and their ways of seeing others participating in track & field, the boys often speak about them-

selves and other boys in a straightforward and unproblematic way. The girls on the other hand, speak about themselves and other girls in a problematic way. This is not an unexpected result, but the conventional interpretation is that it is a sign of gender inequalities in sport. From a genealogical point of view, it might rather be seen as an effect of gender equity policies.

Gender equity policy can be seen as a practical strategy of guaranteeing women and men the opportunities to do the same thing—sport, simultaneously performing two distinct and clearly differentiated gendered subjects, to be equalised. As such, gender equity policies might be perceived as an apparatus that produces and regulates sexual/gender difference.

"If I'm Not Nervous, I'm Worried, Does That Make Sense?": The Use of Emotion Concepts by Athletes in Accounts of Performance

Abigail Locke

Traditionally research into emotions in sport has focused on the impact of specific emotions upon performance, most notably anxiety. This paper approaches emotion from the perspective of discursive psychology, drawing on the methods of discourse analysis and conversation analysis. Using interview data from high level athletes, this paper examines the uses of emotion concepts in accounts of athletic performance. What becomes apparent through the analysis is that athletes claim that specific emotions such as nervousness are normal in sporting performance. In contrast, when accounting for failure, the athletes construct their build-up to the competition as containing no experience of these emotions. Rather than in traditional sports psychological research whereby emotions are seen to be quantifiable, this paper demonstrates how emotion terms form a rich interactional currency that are embedded within our accounting practices.

Psychological Object Analysis (POA). A Descriptive Approach in Qualitative Research in Sport Sciences

Andreas M. Marlovits

The article describes the "psychological object analysis," a qualitative procedure of describing and analyzing, which expands and complements the methods in qualitative sports research. It is especially well-suited as a complementary procedure for addressing questions regarding the structural psychological analysis of motions specific to a certain kind of sport and its cultural-psychological meaning ("social meaning"). This is usually explored with the help of qualitative research approaches. Research concerning sports topics faces the problem that respondents frequently have difficulties describing their

experience verbally in an accurate manner. This is not surprising given that the experiences specific to a certain type of sport are primarily body-centered. An experience, which is difficult to grasp in verbal description. This is where psychological object analysis can be useful. It complements classical interview surveys by providing psychological description and analysis of *sports equipment*, meaning the objects that are automatically associated with a certain kind of sport.

This article clarifies the concept of psychological object analysis by describing the trend-sport snowboarding. In addition to presenting the results of a qualitative psychological interview survey, a psychological description and analysis of the sports equipment used for snowboarding is given. Furthermore, the process of and guidelines for psychological object analysis are discussed. This illustrates how the findings of the psychological object analysis can expand and complement the results of classical interview surveys, especially regarding the depth of their cultural-psychological insight. This illustrates how the findings of the psychological object analysis can expand and complement the results of classical interview surveys by way of adding to the cultural-psychological depth.

Qualitative Research in Sport Sciences: Is the Biomedical Ethics Model Applicable?

Steve Olivier & Lesley Fishwick

Research in sports science has historically been grounded in positivist traditions. This means that ethics committees may not be adequately sensitized to the ethical problems posed by qualitative research. Qualitative researchers may thus be disadvantaged in the research approval process. Our paper argues that the traditional biomedical ethics model may not always be appropriate in evaluating qualitative proposals. Due to the nature of its methods, qualitative work may have emergent and ongoing ethical issues that require consultation and resolution. We argue that, contrary to the judgements of many ethics committees, methods such as deception and covert observation can be justified if certain conditions are met. In reaffirming a commitment to the overarching ethical principle of respect for persons, we conclude that researchers need to recognize and plan for ethical issues in their work. Likewise, ethics committees need to recognize that qualitative work poses unique problems, but that these need not necessarily be insurmountable obstacles to project approval.

Subjective Theories on Feedback of High Level Athletics Coaches and Their Athletes

Katja Schmitt & Udo Hanke

In sport science, research on augmented feedback in motor learning has received special attention for quite some time. In many traditional studies on feedback, however, the complexity of the interaction process when giving and receiving feedback was reduced, limiting the focus of research either to fundamentals of motor learning, to descriptive studies on observable feedback behavior of coaches or to measuring the effectiveness of augmented feedback on learning process. Naturally these limitations contributed to a narrowing of the notion of feedback. The following study broadens the scope of research by supplementing the observable processes of feedback interaction by reconstructing the cognitive processes, i.e. subjective theories of coaches and their athletes. Based on an epistemological view of humans it can be assumed that coaches as well as their athletes have developed implicit theories on feedback that they hold to be optimal for developing motor skills. In cases where the subjective theory of a coach is in agreement with the theory on feedback of his or her athlete, interaction should be void of "communicative friction." Using the research program on "subjective theories" developed by GROEBEN, WAHL, SCHLEE and SCHEELE (1988) as a starting point, 25 top-level coach-athlete dyads in track and field were interviewed, reconstructing their individualized subjective theories on feedback by applying a new method of reconstruction. In addition to this, the observable behavior of the coach was videotaped during a normal training session. A comparison of subjective theories was carried out and the videotaped data allowed for an additional comparison that of subjective theories to the behavior displayed by the coach. The results indicated that in 15 out of 25 pairs the reconstructed theories of feedback were largely congruent, while agreement between the verbalized theories of the coach and his observable behavior averaged only 60%.

Ethnographic Perspectives in Sport Science in Germany—Status Quo and Developmental Potentials

Jörg Thiele

The question of the significance and importance of ethnographic approaches within the German-speaking sports sciences could briefly be answered with a "negative report", if one is interested in having a look at studies that are explicitly accounted as *ethnographic*. This estimation changes, if the perspective is widened and the idea of "estrangement of the own culture" (i.e. the sports cul-

ture), as one main principle of research interest in sports sciences, is taken as a basis.

The vitality of the development, establishment and variation alone of so-called youth cultures (and their interpretations of sports) or even the exclusiveness and extremeness of particular traditional areas in sports (e.g. top-level sport) contain to a substantial extent experiences of foreignness. However, with the areas mentioned a complete naming of items is not intended. In fact, in this context efforts increased in the last few years to understand such "life-worlds", which can be described with the term "life-world ethnography", although the particular authors did not do so themselves.

Against this background the article describes the following issues at hand: first, it deals with the explication of a kind of ethnographic self-conception which opens up additional possibilities for sports science, secondly, existing studies in sports science are examined for these possibilities, and finally, the question of potential benefit of a explicit and systematic integration of ethnographic research into sports science is discussed. In the conclusion, the disciplines of sport sociology and sport pedagogy are mentioned.